



Washington State Senate

The Benton Bulletin

17TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT UPDATE FROM SENATOR DON BENTON

2002 Session Update

The Legislature convened on Monday, January 14, 2002, for its regular 60-day session.

After a long and hard-fought battle over the budget and transportation last year, we came back to Olympia this year to face a \$1.3 billion hole in the budget, a failing transportation system in desperate need of improvement, and a tough economic climate resulting in one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation.

The Current Budget Crisis is the result of a combination of increasing costs and declining revenues—creating a \$1.3 billion hole in the state's 2001-03 biennial budget for the remaining fiscal year. To deal with the budget shortfall, the governor has proposed major cuts in K-12 programs, human services and natural resources. I believe that he is using these particular cuts to set the stage for a variety of tax increases.

Tax increases to fix the state operating budget are absolutely unnecessary. We should begin with a state government hiring freeze for nonessential services—a step that could save \$153 million over the next 18 months. Since we asked the governor to do this on Sept. 13, well over 350 new state employees have been hired at an average compensation of over \$55,000 per year.

In addition, cutting back where costs have risen, such as out-of-state travel on the state's dime, equipment purchases, retreats and training conferences could save the state nearly \$300 million. Other simple measures, like opening up the bidding process for state services to the private sector, has the potential to save hundreds of millions of dollars while still providing the same or better services.

As I expressed last year when I voted against the budget, we need to commit to supporting a sustainable budget that weathers tough economic times without raising taxes on the already overburdened tax-payers.

Transportation on a Fast Track

Adopting efficiencies and reforms recommended by the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation was our first order of business. The Senate passed these bills in 2001, but the House, then plagued by an even party split, failed to act.

Within the first two weeks of the 2002 session, the Senate approved seven transportation efficiency measures to add to the two passed last session:

ESSB 5743 - Increasing the number of apprenticeships and training programs to ensure there will be enough skilled workers to deliver transportation projects.

SSB 5748 - Integrating transportation and land-use planning.

2ESSB 5749 - Adopting a cost-benefit analysis for transportation planning.

ESSB 5759 - Improving traffic chokepoints by requiring priority programming for transportation improvements to be based on traffic congestion and a benefit-cost analysis to determine the value of the proposed project.

ESSB 5760 - Directing the use of intelligent transportation systems and traffic system management to improve the highway system's performance and capacity.

2ESSB 5764 - Requiring certain city and county entities to take certain steps to help maintain and preserve transportation facilities and assets.

ESHB 2304 - Ties together several of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation efficiencies, including provisions that include setting policy goals based on Blue Ribbon benchmark recommendations, contracting out transportation construction engineering services, transportation apprenticeships and prevailing wage assessments, and transportation planning and efficiencies.

In addition to the efficiency measures, a proposal is being crafted that would increase the gas tax to pay for the much needed transportation improvements in our state. The 20-year transportation needs of the state equals \$42 billion, and much of that is in our area.

This proposal must go to a vote of the people—after all, that is who will ultimately foot the bill.



Senator
Don Benton

Committee assignments:

- Transportation, Ranking Republican Member
- Labor, Commerce & Financial Institutions

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Working for Washington

This fall, Senators Zarelli, Carlson and I met with Vancouver area business owners to hear their ideas on how our state could be a better place to do business. As part of a statewide Senate Republican study, this “listening tour” was extremely successful in gauging the business climate. Our intent was to gather comments and ideas from our area’s business leaders and bring them back to Olympia. As a result, much of what they contributed has been incorporated into legislative proposals this session.

To give you an idea of the kinds of bills we have been working on, here are two of our bills aimed at easing the regulatory burden on businesses:

- SB 6251** - requires the governor to approve all agency rules before they are implemented; and
- SB 6252** - limits the rule-making authority of state agencies to that which is specifically granted by the Legislature.

Bills Prime Sponsored by Senator Benton

In addition to working diligently on transportation and the budget, I have several proposals that I have been working on this session, all of which have had public hearings.

SB 6389 - Follows through on a promise I made to our local school bus drivers. It requires the state superintendent of public instruction to change its rules to allow school bus drives to display the U.S. flag on their buses.

SJM 8032 - In light of the Sept. 11 attacks, our country has grown closer than ever, and patriotism has blossomed. This memorial asks congress and the President to name Sept. 11 Patriot’s Day.

- SB 6390** - Requires the Department of Transportation to lease out safety rest areas to private businesses while protecting the non-profit organizations that currently raise funds at the sites.
- SB 6501** - Places restrictions on where sex and kidnapping offenders could live once they are released from incarceration. They must not live within close proximity of their victim.
- SB 6391** - To protect your personal privacy, when applying for recreational licenses, such as hunting and fishing, you would no longer be required to provide your social security number.

Please Join Us!

STATE SENATOR DON BENTON
Cordially Invites You To Attend 17th District Events

LEGISLATIVE DAY
Monday, February 18, 2002, 10:00 am to 2:00 pm in House Hearing Room C of the John L. O’Brien Building at your state Capitol

TOWNHALL MEETINGS
Saturday, February 23, 2002, 12:30 pm at Hockinson Middle School & 3:30 pm at the Camas Washougal Courthouse

(Also in attendance will be your Representatives Marc Boldt and Jim Dunn, and 18th District Senator Joseph Zarelli, and Representatives Tom Mielke and Ed Orcutt.)

For more information, please call (360) 786-7632

Please use this space for any comments, suggestions or problems you would like me to know about. Or call the toll-free Legislative Hotline at 1-800-562-6000.



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